

society. The fact that the Secret Service feels compelled to close Pennsylvania Avenue is an important reminder that we have to come together as a people and hold fast against the divisive tactics of violent extremists.

We saw in the awful tragedy of Oklahoma City and the bombing of the World Trade Center that America, as an open and free society, is not immune from terrorists from within and beyond our borders who believe they have a right to kill innocent civilians to pursue their own political ends or to protest other policies. Such people seek to instill fear in our citizens, in our whole people. But when we are all afraid to get on a bus or drive to work or open an envelope or send our children off to school, when our children are fixated on the possibility of terrorist action against them or other innocent children, we give terrorists a victory. That kind of corrosive fear could rust our national spirit, drain our will, and wear away our freedom.

These are the true stakes in our war against terrorism. We cannot allow ourselves to be frightened or intimidated into a bunker mentality. We cannot allow our sacred freedoms to wither or diminish. We cannot allow the paranoia and conspiracy theories of extreme militants to dominate our society.

What we do today is a practical step to preserve freedom and peace of mind. It should be seen as a step in a long line of efforts to improve security in the modern world that began with the installation of airport metal detectors. I remember when that started, and a lot of people thought that it might be seen as a restriction on our freedom. But most of us

take it for granted now, and, after all, hijackings have gone way down. The airport metal detectors increased the freedom of the American people, and so can this.

But more must be done to reduce the threat of terrorism, to deter terrorism. First, Congress must pass my antiterrorism legislation. We mustn't let our country fight the war against terrorism ill-armed or ill-prepared. I want us to be armed with 1,000 more FBI agents. I want the ability to monitor high-tech communications among far-flung terrorists. I want to be able to have our people learn their plans before they strike. That's the key. Congress can give us these tools by passing the antiterrorism bill before them. And they should do it now. Congressional leaders pledged to pass this bill by Memorial Day, in the wake of the terrible bombing in Oklahoma City. This is a commitment Congress must keep.

On a deeper level, we must all fight terrorism by fighting the fear that terrorists sow. Today the Secret Service is taking a necessary precaution, but let no one mistake: We will not relinquish our fundamental freedoms. We will secure the personal safety of all Americans to live and move about as they please, to think and to speak as they please, to follow their beliefs and their conscience, as our Founding Fathers intended.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:28 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m.

Remarks at the White House Conference on Character Building for a Civil and Democratic Society *May 20, 1995*

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Dr. Etzioni. Thank you for that introduction and for the inspiration that your work has given to me and to so many others, for your wonderful book, "The Spirit of Community," and for working on this as hard as you have. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to one of the co-founders of this network—he's been a member of the White House staff since I became Presi-

dent—Bill Galston, for his constant inspiration and prodding to me. I'd like to thank the Secretary of Education and Tom Payzant, the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, for what they have done to try to promote character education as a part of the larger strategy toward a new communitarian vision for our country.

You know, from the time I began thinking about how we would get into the 21st century, and long before I even thought of running for President, it seemed to me that the—there were three words which were inextricably linked, as if you think about America moving into the future: opportunity, responsibility, and community. Those were the three words that basically were at the heart of my campaign for President and have been at the heart of what I have tried to do as President. I also believe that Government cannot do these things for America. I believe that we have to have, in a complicated, open, pluralistic society like this one, a great network of people working together in every major important center of our society. And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

I'd like to begin with a few comments about the most obvious recent event that, in terms of your Government's action, that you must have noticed when you came in today, which is that I have approved of the Secretary of the Treasury's decision to close the two blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue just here in front of the White House to vehicular traffic.

I did this reluctantly. Pennsylvania Avenue has been open to ordinary traffic since the beginning of our Republic. I did it after an extensive review by the Secret Service, the Treasury Department officials, and a distinguished independent panel of American experts who have served in administrations of both the Democratic and Republican Presidents, all recommending that this be done. They believe it is necessary to protect the President and his family, the structure of the White House, the hundreds of people who work there, and the people who come and visit there, both on official business and as ordinary citizens. They believe it is necessary to protect the White House against the kind of attacks that were sustained in Oklahoma City.

Now, I want to emphasize a couple of things about this. First of all, access to the White House itself will not be limited. The area will be converted into a pedestrian mall, and people will be able to visit as they always have. They'll be able to have their picture taken out front with cardboard figures as they always have. [Laughter] They'll be able to go to Lafayette Park and protest against the President as they always have. And indeed, they will be able to do that more protected themselves from becoming innocent victims of those who would seek to destroy the symbols of our freedom. We also will be

working with the local officials here to make every effort to reroute the traffic in a way that minimizes inconvenience and disruption to the lives of those who live in or work in Washington, DC.

Our society, as an open society, is, as we saw with Japan and the terrible incident in the Japanese subway, vulnerable to the forces of organized destruction from within and beyond our borders. And we must take reasonable precautions against them, not to restrict our freedom but to secure it. And as technology changes the opportunity for organized destruction, we have to respond to that.

I think the American people should see this in the same context that they viewed metal detectors in airports. Do you remember when they started? There were those who say "Oh, this is a big infringement on our freedom." But most of us now are only too happy to go through those metal detectors because we see that there are a lot fewer hijackings. And so it is a way of preserving our freedom by changing to meet the changing realities that technology and time give for the expression of organized destruction. And we should view it in that way.

But we should also recognize that our job is to minimize the fear that can seep into a society. That's one of the reasons that Hillary and I wanted to have the program we had with the children after Oklahoma City, because we were worried about children all across America and especially, of course, children in Oklahoma being literally fixated on these events and their vulnerability to such things.

So, it's important to put them in a larger context. And in that sense, it's also important to prevent such things from happening whenever we can. This is a preventive action we're taking today.

I have asked Congress to pass this anti-terrorism legislation to give me both people and technological tools—not to me but to me being the United States, to us—to deal with the technological and organizational realities of the modern terrorist threat so that we can prevent these things from happening more and more and more. And the leaders of Congress have pledged to pass that legislation by Memorial Day. It is a commitment I hope they will keep because we need the legislation in preventive ways.

Now, what's that got to do with what we're doing here today? The strength of our society is far more than our ability to stop bad things

from happening and to punish wrongdoers when they do such things. This country is still around today after more than 200 years as the most successful, vibrant democracy in all of human history, not because we could stop bad things from happening, although that was important. If the Civil War had turned out differently, we wouldn't be here today as a country. If Hitler had been allowed to prevail in Europe, it would be a very different world today. So stopping bad things from happening is quite important; it shouldn't be minimized.

But the fundamental strength of America, and the real reason we're here after more than 200 years, is not our capacity to stop bad things from happening but our ability to do good and, indeed, our ability to be good. De Tocqueville said, "America is great because America is good."

So, the truly great things about our country involve the literally billions of actions that are now taken by our 250 plus million citizens every day of the world. They get up, they go about their business, and most of them do the very best they can to be responsible, first of all, as individuals and then to be responsible for their families, to be responsible at work, to be successful members of their community, to be good citizens.

Most of our fellow citizens do everything they're supposed to do pretty much when they're supposed to do it, even things they find most distasteful, like paying their taxes. It has long been observed by—I know that when I was a young law student taking tax law—and it gave me a headache. I just couldn't stand it. I hated the course, all those rules and regulations. When it was all said and done—the professor said at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the course, "Now, remember, in spite of all these rules and regulations that no one can keep up with and hardly anyone understands, the real thing that makes this work is that you live in a good country where most people just get up and, on their own, do the right thing because they think this is part of the obligation of citizenship." It made a deep impression on me.

So, I think that when we view the problems of America today, and there are plenty of them—the intolerance, the increasing divisiveness of political forces, the seeming two-edged sword of the information revolution where more and more information seems to be organized

to harm instead of to enlighten, to divide instead of unite—when we look at all of this, we have to see it against the background of the fundamental fact that this is a very great country full of very good people and almost all of us get up every day and do what we're supposed to do as best we can; that there are new and different challenges we face today that put extreme pressure on us in trying to do good and be good, pressure in the family, pressure in the workplace, pressure in the community and in the larger society; that we are trying to cope with economic and social stresses and with the exposure to all kinds of forces in a complex modern world that we often were not exposed to in the past and that none of—some of us had never been exposed to before.

And I think that the real trick is how we can keep the basic values that have made our country great and take advantage of the modern world with all the things that are different. That has always been the genius of America, to preserve what is right there in the Constitution and to take it throughout history. We know that we are capable of doing it unanimously. What we're really all afraid of is that somehow we'll be undone either by some small minority of us who do wrong and force all the rest of us into a way of living that is so radically different from what's been before that we don't preserve what's uniquely American, or we're afraid that all these forces will upset the internal balance in so many of us that we will lose our way.

And yet, we know that fundamentally we shouldn't be pessimistic about it, and we're reminded of it every time something bad happens in America. When we had a 500-year flood in the Middle West or that massive earthquake in California or the World Trade Center bombing or the horrible, horrible tragedy of Oklahoma City, you see not only the loss and the evil and the darkness, you also see the fundamental goodness of the American people. These people everywhere just stop what they're doing and show up to help.

I remember when they had that awful hurricane in Florida and I went down there, the first guy I met was an independent trucker from Michigan who literally canceled all of his runs, stopped all of his business, and filled his one big semi truck and brought it all the way to Florida—stopped his whole life. And he was just a single business person who was not like me, an employee of the Federal Government

who could maybe get time off. [Laughter] He risked everything just because it was the right thing to do. Here was this guy showing up and happy as a clam, didn't have any idea what was going to happen when he went back to Michigan, how he was going to put it back together. He was happy doing something for other people, consistent with his personal values and what he had learned in his family and church and what he had imparted to his children.

Now, the question is, how can we preserve the traditional values and how can we find at least a measure of the fulfillment in doing right and good things in ordinary life that we find when disaster strikes? Is there something endemic to the modern world or human nature that says that we can't do that? I don't think so. But we plainly live in a world that is changing so fast, where people are exposed to so many forces, that the ties that bind us are stretched more than there were in the world in which I grew up. I don't think there's any question about that. The opportunities for individuals to have their internal equilibrium upset are far greater today than they were a generation ago.

It's important not to romanticize the past, however. Remember what Will Rogers said about that? "Don't tell me about the good ol' days; they never was." It's important not to romanticize the past. While I grew up in a society which was much more stable and where I didn't have anything like the kind of forces bearing down on me that teenagers do today, when I was a child I also lived in a segregated society in which a huge number of people my age were never going to be given any opportunities that I took for granted. So it is important for us not to overly romanticize the past but also to recognize that the present is changing so fast and people are exposed to so many different things that it is very, very difficult to build the kind of coherent, character-based society that builds both individual and social responsibility and gives people the necessary balance between stability and change that allows you to live the fullest possible, most rewarding life and to have a society that is both growing and vibrant and stable. I think we all recognize that as a sort of central challenge of this time.

And I think what happens when a big disaster occurs, everybody throws off all the things that are bothering them and gets back to basics. People stop looking at each other as people of dif-

ferent races or religions or philosophical positions or political parties and realize that there is a common humanity there after all. The trick will be to manage our differences on a daily basis in a way that recognizes our common humanity and to find organized ways to stamp out the social evils that are consuming us, without doing away with our personal freedoms. And I believe that we can do these things. I believe that sometimes we throw up our hands too much in the face of all the difficulties that we have. But we have to identify what the problems are and move on them.

I also believe that the central insight of what Dr. Etzioni has done is important to emphasize here. Everyone has a role to play. And we can solve this in a free and open society, not by any Governmental policy but by Government, like every other part of society, playing its own role.

If we could start with some of the problems that are disintegrating forces in our society, I would like to focus on some that we don't often focus on, and those are the economic ones. We all know we have too much crime and violence and drugs and family breakdown. And I don't mean to minimize those things; they are profoundly important. But we are aware and sensitive to those things. I want you also to think about things that may be more pedestrian but also are reinforcing the problem that we come here to talk about.

The average American today is working a longer work week and spending fewer hours with his or her children than they were 25 years ago, for the same or lower wages they were making 15 years ago. Literally 60 percent of the American work force is making the same or less, when you adjust for inflation, than they were making 15 years ago and working harder and spending less time with their children than they were 25 years ago. Family income has gone up in many places only because there are now two workers in the family.

There is also in our country a feeling that there is much less security because more and more people are changing their jobs. The census tells us that there's been about a 14 percent decline in earnings for men between the ages of 55 and 65—excuse me, 45 and 55. It could have something to do with the so-called angry white male phenomenon. So that when people reach the peak of what they thought was going to be their—not only their earning capacity but

their ability to have a profound and positive impact on their families and on their society, their communities, many of them now are at a vulnerable period when they're having to deal with changes that they took for granted when they were in their twenties but never expected to have to face all over again in their forties or early fifties. This is a profound thing.

So that we at least thought when we started out in life, we'd have different kinds of things to feel anxieties about as we got older. I mean, just getting older is bad enough. [Laughter] And now, we're having to feel anxieties about things that we thought would be behind us as a people into our 40's and 50's. This is a profound thing. No one has really studied the implications this has for citizenship and why more and more people may be vulnerable to siren songs of resentment that divide us instead of unite us.

I'm telling you, there are millions of people that go home every night and sit down at the dinner table and look across the table at their families and wonder whether they have failed them, when all they ever did was show up for work, because of the way the global economy has impacted on them in this society. This is a significant thing.

And when you combine that with the fact that there is so much mobility in this society, much more than ever before, it is more difficult for many of these people to get the kind of support networks they need in their communities because a lot of folks live in communities where neighbors don't know their neighbors anymore. And if there's a high crime rate in the community, they don't have any way to get to know them.

So that all these things need to be seen in that context. There is a great deal of uncertainty out there, which makes people yearn for certainty but also makes them vulnerable to the wrong kind of certainty, certainty that pits people against one another instead of gives them a way to say, "Here are my problems; what are your problems? Let's get together and figure out how to solve them."

So I think that the sense of, literally, physical instability so many adults feel make it more difficult to hold our society together and make it more difficult to impart the fundamental character strengths and traits, and the accompanying security of knowing that you're in the right place in your life, that are essential to a strong society—not an excuse for not doing it, but it's

important to understand the context in which we operate here.

Now, one of the things that we have thought about in our administration is that in this environment, when so many of our children are in families that are at least not traditional families, when their parents are working, working harder and maybe spending less time with them, and when their neighborhoods may be less settled and in many cases less safe, it is more important than it has been perhaps in immediately previous years to reemphasize the role of character education in our schools—something which once was taken for granted as a part of education, sort of faded away, and we believe should be brought back. We know it has to be a supplement for the work that families and communities do, not a replacement. We know there's no substitute for the character lessons that are imparted to people by their parents and grandparents or for the guidance that a father or mother can bring or, maybe even more importantly, for the sense of security and rootedness that the right kind of relationships within families give us all. But still, I think it's important to recognize that all of our children show up for school sooner or later, and character education can be a vital part of building the kind of society that recognizes responsibilities and has a sense of community.

This is an issue I've been involved with for years. Several years ago in the mid-eighties, I served on the Carnegie commission for middle school education. There were two Governors on that commission; I had the privilege of being one. The other was the distinguished Republican Governor of New Jersey, Tom Kean. And one of the recommendations we made was that we should teach our children in middle school with specific objectives to, quote, "behave ethically and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society," and that we had to connect our schools to our communities, which together share responsibility for each student's success.

When I became President, we started to work on this through the Department of Education. Secretary Riley has helped us to go a good ways toward the right kind of introduction of values into our schools. Everybody knows that education is about more than intellect. Everybody knows, as my mother used to say, there's a lot of smart fools running around in this old world. [Laughter] And what we want to do is to build good citizens as well as intelligent people.

We need to learn what it takes to build up and not tear down a society over the long run. So we've worked hard on that. Most of you know that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act contained new authority for programs that foster character education, for us to support them. And in partnership with local communities, we are now making States eligible to compete for grants to help to support the institution of character education programs in local school districts all across the country. I personally long for the day when this is once again a regular part of the curriculum of every school district in the United States. I think it is very, very important.

The safe and drug-free school program, which is one of the things I've been fighting for in this little rescission battle we've got going on here in Washington today, also has specific, explicit efforts in it to create an environment in which children are able to learn and in which we not only make schools safe and drug-free by negative actions like security devices but in which we change the attitudes of children about what is acceptable within the schools, what is acceptable conduct within the schools.

All of you know that there is some evidence out there already that these character education programs really work to lower the drop out rate, to increase educational performance, and to increase good citizenship. It is elementary. It is simple. But I think it is profoundly important that young people be taught that it's important to tell the truth, that it's important to be trustworthy and for people to be able to rely on you, that it's important not to abuse the freedom you have by undermining other people's ability to exercise their freedom. They need to be taught certain basic things in the context of the school environment, which is, after all, for many of them, the first diverse community they will ever be a part of. So I feel very strongly that this is part of what we ought to be doing, but not all.

I think that, as I said, the fundamental insight that I have gotten about how to do this from Dr. Etzioni is that we have to build networks. And this, as you know, is the second conference on character building we've had where we've welcomed people to the White House. I would very much like to see this institutionalized as an annual event that goes way beyond my administration, that encompasses Republicans and

Democrats, and that has nothing to do with politics.

Indeed, I think we should view this effort in our country not as bipartisan but as non-partisan. And we need to think about ways that we can continue to build networks that work together for a generation, because a lot of our problems were a generation in coming and they're going to be a generation in going, and because there is nothing we can do that will stop the world from changing as quickly as it is, so we're going to have to work harder and harder to think of ways that keep the ties that bind. Therefore, I believe this should become a permanent fixture of our national dialog.

I would like to also, from my point of view, take this up a notch in the present time because of the dimensions of our challenges. On June 21st, I'm going to invite leaders to come here from all around the country to listen to each other, to open a dialog, to try to find common ground on our great social challenges of the day, and to talk about what it would take to build not only good character but good citizenship from people individually and in groups, and to see whether or not we can accelerate this dialog throughout the country. I am going to ask academic and business leaders, religious leaders, media people, people from the sports community, people from other aspects of the private sector, and of course, Government folks to try to build the kind of partnership that I think is necessary.

James Madison once said that all governments required virtue of their citizens, but democracies needed it more than other kinds of government. And I believe that. Some of you may know that Hillary is now working on a book about the responsibilities we owe to our children. The title will come from that old African proverb, it takes a whole village to raise a child.

Now, I ask you to think about this—and I would like to make some closing remarks about where I'm going with this June 21st conference and invite you to give me your ideas about it. I think that in the world we are living in, it will take a lot of people, and not just Government programs, to keep our children off the streets and in school. It will take every parent, teacher, friend, and loved one we can find to teach children, given all their different circumstances in America today, the differences between right and wrong and to give them the kind of self-esteem they need to do well in

a troubled world, to say no to the right things but also to figure out what to say yes to, which in the end is the basis of the quality of life we all live.

And I am absolutely convinced, as I have watched the patterns of life in our society, that as people go through different stages in their lives or they're in different places in society, most of them are not most influenced by Government, there are other forces which are influencing them, and that we all have to pull together if we're going to have any hope of succeeding in this enterprise.

If you look at business, for example—I mentioned the economic changes—I had to fight like crazy for the family and medical leave law. It had already been passed by Congress twice and vetoed twice by well-meaning people who thought that—business people said, “Oh, the world will come to an end if the family medical leave law passes.” But it cannot be, if you think about it, first and foremost, it cannot be that a society where the economic forces require most adults to work—women and men, even parents of very young children—it cannot be that a good society can be built unless people can succeed as both workers and parents. If we cannot succeed as workers, then our standard of living will fall and everything that we think about America will begin to be eroded. But if we don't succeed as parents, then we'll have a lot of people with money and miserable lives. And we have too many people in this country today, not only poor people but people who aren't poor, who have miserable lives.

So, the first and most fundamental thing we have to say is, how are people going to succeed as workers and as parents? The Government can do the family and medical leave law, but that's just the first step. How can you justify the fact that most people are working harder for less money when business profits are up and corporations are up? We had record numbers of new millionaires last year. I like that, by the way. I don't think wealth formation is bad. I think it's good. But the thing that holds a democratic society together is that everybody gets their fair share.

In the 12 years before I became President—this has nothing to do with Government policies, nearly as I can determine—executive salaries went up 4 times as much as workers' salaries went up in major American corporations and 3 times as much as corporate profits went up.

And you can say, “Well, labor's not worth as much as it used to be because technology means fewer people can do more with less.” That may be, but all those people are still people. They have children to raise. They have mortgages to pay. They have problems to confront.

One of the companies that I really admire in this country today has set up a system in which both the workers and the executives get paid based on the performance of the company, so that when the company does well, the workers have just a big a gain as the executives. And if the company has a bad turn, the executives have to take an even bigger hit percentagewise than the workers. Now, that's the kind—they also have as part of their bonus program a \$2,000-a-year grant to every child of every employee in the company that goes to college. They have one person that sent 11 kids to college working for that company. The only reason I'm not telling you who the company is, is I don't want every person with six or more children in America to go apply for work there. *[Laughter]*

But don't you see? Here is a company that says, “Okay, we want to make money. We want to do well. We think we can do right and do well. We want a—we believe we'll make more money if the people working for us know they can make more money if the company does well.” This is part of citizenship. I'm not suggesting the Government should mandate this. I'm talking about partnerships, networking, community, open and honest discussion. But first and foremost, most of the work of building character in America is going to be done in the family, and you must make it possible for people to succeed as parents and workers. So, that should be a part of this debate.

Now, the media has a responsibility here. We have tough choices to make as a country. People need to know the facts that will shape their future—important for adults, important for children. Let me give you an example: Weekly Reader is launching a new project to teach the value of citizenship to young children through stories. That's a good thing. That's the sort of thing the media can do. I'm not suggesting the Government should mandate it, but we should talk about it. Nobody should feel threatened or feel like we're trying to encroach on the first amendment by discussing the power on social behavior that the media has. We should

be able to discuss it without anybody being defensive about it.

Here in Washington, we are facing difficult but important issues of public policy. We have two huge deficits from a public policy point of view. We've got a Government budget deficit, which is much lower than it was when I became President, but it's too big. And we do need, in a global economy, a balanced budget because we don't want to be more dependent than we have to be on outside forces and we want to be able to invest in our future. But we also have a big education deficit and training deficit compared to many other countries and compared to what we need for America to be the strongest and greatest economy in the world in the 21st century.

So, we've got a big, tough decision here. How are we going to solve one without undermining the other? Can we do both at the same time? If so, how? Now, this can immediately dissolve into a huge political screaming match in which one party sticks up for one, the other sticks up for the other, everybody gets reelected at election time, and nobody gets anything done. That would not be good. What we need to do is to figure out how we can reach across the divides to a common consensus that will permit us to pursue both these objectives at the same time.

The American people are ready for some tough decisions and difficult medicine, but they want to know that it's fair and sensible and what's down there at the end of the road. And to do it, we need to get information in a way that is not designed to divide us but is designed to shed more light than heat. And it is a very difficult thing, but very important.

Religious and community institutions have an important role to play. You know, if every church in America, every church in America had not only a vigorous program for its own members and the people it's recruiting but also an outreach to a fixed number of families and children to fight the problems of out-of-wedlock birth, teen pregnancy, drug addiction, school dropout—if every single church had just a fixed and reasonable number of kids it was targeting, it might have more impact than all the Government programs we could ever devise.

This is the most religious country in the world. We have the largest number of churches, the most diverse group of people worshipping in different kinds of religions. And again, it's

not for the Government to require this, but it's worth talking about. Because there is a great debate today in the religious community about whether the best thing you can do for society to make it better is go out and try to actually work with people who are in trouble and make them better individually, or to simply make political prescriptions that everyone else should follow and if they do, fine, and if they don't, we'll wait for the next election.

So, I think this is a debate we ought to have. Because—I have no objection, by the way, to the political debate, and I have encouraged the people of faith who come to different political conclusions than I have to be a part of the debate. I don't think that's bad. But I think we are not purely either political animals, people who go to work, or churchgoers. We also have community responsibilities and opportunities. And the organized churches of this country can have a big impact on changing the lives of people and improving the character of people and the prospects of people today in the country. And many do, many do. If all did, it would make a big difference in our ability to move forward on common ground.

If you think about—let me mention the entertainment industry. There's been a lot said about that, and I got a big standing ovation at the State of the Union from both Republican and Democratic Members of Congress when I talked about the damage that comes to our society from incessant, repetitive, mindless violence coming through entertainment. There are lots of studies showing that young people tend to get numbed to violence and to the consequences of it from constant overexposure to it. And I say this not to point the finger at anybody. I have enjoyed more than my fair share of what I would call cheap thrills movies in my time, so I am not being sanctimonious about this. I'm just saying it is an established fact that if children from very early ages are exposed to huge volumes of a certain kind of entertainment, it desensitizes them to the same sort of conduct in the real world. There's lots of evidence about that.

And that's why, frankly, I welcome the networks' recent efforts to reduce prime-time violence and why I would applaud the decision that Time-Warner announced this week to set standards for controversial music and to balance creative expression with corporate responsibility. And I applaud the efforts of Bill Bennett, who

was here yesterday, to get that done. The country owes him a debt of gratitude, and we should applaud Time-Warner as well.

The children's educational television act—television education act was passed back in 1990. I think there is more to do here. We need—the broadcasters need to read that act again and adhere to its spirit as well as to its letters. We should be thinking twice before movies and rap music that celebrate violence against women or law enforcement officers are put out there in huge volume, in piling one on top of one another. There is a connection, in this sense, between words and deeds. We do get dulled of that to which we are overexposed in a banalizing way.

Let me finally say that I think politicians have a responsibility here. And instead of criticizing others, let me start with myself. If you want to be an elected official in a democracy you must, first of all, get people to identify with you more than your opponent. And you must say, "Here are the differences between us, and here's what I stand for. Here are the choices we face, and here are the decisions I would make. And here is why I would make those decisions." So in that sense, conflict and difference and dividing up the electorate are the essence of politics.

But there is a big difference between division and difference of opinion and destruction and demonization. And there is a big difference between difference and dehumanization. Let me just begin—let me just—I'll start with me, because this is something I've been through in the last few weeks.

I know that I—I don't know of a politician that hasn't done this that's been around very long, but I don't know how many times that I have made references to Government bureaucrats, right? Because when a politician stands up and says something about Government bureaucrats, 99 times out of 100, the word is used in a pejorative sense, right? And it's used to remind you of the fact that the person you've elected is not really a part of the Government, he's a part of you, that he's more like a tax payer than a tax consumer. And we know you resent paying your taxes, and we know you think a lot of it is wasted. And so, if we who are elected talk about Government bureaucrats, you'll know we're still on your side, even though we're living over here on the other side.

You know what I'm talking about. Now, almost—first of all, there is some individual truth to all this. That is, there is hardly an American living who hasn't had some encounter with the Government that was distasteful, right? [*Laughter*] Because as long as people are running the Government, they will be like people running churches, people running businesses, people running whatever it is you do: People are imperfect, and they'll mess up, and when they do, they drive other people up the wall.

But the Government has a special relationship to people because it has the power of law behind it. So, almost everybody can remember someone who was at least rude or perhaps a law enforcement official that abused authority on occasion or a tax person who was really unfair or a regulator who was overbearing. Almost everybody has had some experience because we live in a society of human beings where people mess up. So there is some truth to that.

It is also true that at this time, the Government tends to lag the private sector in changes. Sometimes that's good; sometimes that's bad. But it does because the environment in which the Government operates is not as competitive. But that is, we normally have—we have more of a monopoly on income and customers, so it lags. On the other hand, that's not all bad because it helps to be a force of stability too, sometimes, in times of great change. But the Government, in the end, must follow the great trends of the day.

So, must the Government become less bureaucratic, more flexible, more open? Will it be smaller? Will fewer people do more with less? Absolutely. All that will happen. We had to take the size of the Government down. It's already over 100,000 smaller than it was when I became President. We had to get rid of hundreds of programs that just didn't make any sense any more. We have to do these things. And we have to take it down more. We have to continue to reduce unnecessary spending. And we'll have to have more people take these early retirement packages and all that. That's all true.

But that's different from saying "Government bureaucrats" in a demeaning way. Let me tell you something—you think about this. The children who died in that child care center in Oklahoma City were the children of Government bureaucrats. The people who were carried out of that building from the Agriculture Depart-

ment, from the Veterans Affairs Administration, from the Housing and Urban Development Department, and from all of our law enforcement agencies, the Secret Service, the ATF, all of them, they were all Government bureaucrats. And I will never, knowingly, use that term again.

So we've all got to start with each other here. I don't know that that's a very good character example. I don't know that that does much to build good character, when you identify a group as a group and pretend that as a group there's something wrong with them.

So I would say to you, to all of you, I am basically very optimistic about the future of this country. I know that we're more violent than we need to be, but we always have been. We always have been, and we need—we've got to get a hold of it. And I know we have too many out-of-wedlock births, but it's a trend that is gripping an awful lot of Western countries. And people have forgotten, in my judgment, the profound emotional consequences to the children who grow up in unstable and inadequately supported environments. So we're not alone in that. We have way too much drug addiction, and we are really almost alone in that. Hardly any other advanced country has anything approaching the levels of violence and drug addiction we do. So we do have profound problems.

Our political debate is too polarized. And we have a lot of people who talk a lot about what's wrong with everybody else and don't do very much to change it. There are all kinds of problems. But look, this is not the Great Depression; this is not World War II; this is not the Civil War; we are not starting from scratch like the Founders did.

We know what to do. We know the difference between right and wrong. We know how to do this. And we can do what we have to do. We can do this. This is not a cause for wringing

of hands. It is difficult. It is a new challenge to figure out how we all work together and still leave room for our differences, how we identify the specific roles of the various influence centers in our society to reinstall character and give a good life to our people. But the fundamental fact is that this is a very great country, and nearly everybody is still getting up every day and doing the very best they can to do what is right. Nearly everybody desperately wants to have children who have good character and who do good and who are good, nearly everybody.

So I think what you are here about is profoundly important. But what I want to say to you is, do not be discouraged. In the light of the whole history of our Republic, this is our job at this time. It is not an undoable job. It is profoundly important. It will be difficult because of all the forces working on people's state of mind that undermine what we have to do. Because it's so much easier in the world today to identify what we're against instead of what we're for. It's so much easier in the world today not to look at the problems within our own hearts and minds because we can always find somebody we think is worse. So it is so much easier to put this off and delay it. And there are no institutions really for bringing us all together, across all the lines that divide us, in our common cause of building what is good about America and building up what is good within the character of our people. But we can do it. And I believe we will.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Amitai Etzioni, founder and chair, Communitarian Network.

Statement on the Hospitalization of Les Aspin

May 20, 1995

I was saddened to hear that former Defense Secretary Les Aspin was hospitalized earlier today. Hillary and I wish him a speedy recovery.

Our prayers are with him and his family at this time.